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SOCIALIST WORKERS' PARTY OF FINLAND, 1920–1923

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On 13 May 1920, 82 people sent by various organisations from all over Finland entered the Helsinki labour hall to establish a new party, Suomen sosialistinen työväenpuolue SSTP (Socialist Workers' Party of Finland). They felt the need for a new party, even though there already were two active workers' parties in Finland; Suomen sosialidemokraattinen puolue SDP (Social Democratic Party of Finland) and Suomalainen kommunistinen puolue SKP (Finnish Communist Party).¹

The eagerness to establish a new workers' party indicated disappointment with the existing ones. The dissatisfaction with the politics of the SDP, re-founded by people who had not participated in the attempts to create Red Finland, had started growing in summer 1919. The condemnation of the attempt to seize power in 1918; focusing on work by the representational organs; the rejection of extra-parliamentary actions, and the willingness to cooperate with centre parties led many within the SDP to criticise the party leadership for forsaking the strict line of class struggle exercised by the pre-Civil War labour movement. These critics were united in the failed attempt to secure a majority at the SDP Congress in December 1919. The readiness of the SDP leadership to rid the

party of 'secret and half-communists' and the eagerness of the critics to separate from the SDP led to the foundation of the SSTP.²

The political line of the SKP did not appeal either. The party was founded in Moscow in August 1918 by those leaders and functionaries of the 1918 revolutionary government who had escaped to Soviet Russia. There they were seized by the notion of world revolution and other Bolshevik ideas. Accordingly, they decided to reject all the traditional forms of the Finnish labour movement and concentrate on propagating the armed revolution and the establishment of a strict dictatorship of the proletariat. However, the SKP functionaries who came to work underground in Finland realised over summer 1919 that the ideas of the SKP founding congress did not work in Finland and started supporting the critics of the SDP leadership. Nevertheless, that did not mean that the SKP would entirely give up on the ideas of the founding congress. In spite of that, the SKP also contributed to the establishment and character of the SSTP.³

The police under the leadership of the Helsinki police commissioner forced an entry to the congress; although, according to the law, the police had the right to be present only in public meetings. The presence of the police,

1 Tauno Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin synty 1918–1923* (Helsinki: KSL, 1996), 158–161.

2 On the re-foundation of the SDP, e.g. Pauli Kettunen, *Poliittinen liike ja sosiaalinen kollektiivisuus: Tutkimus sosialidemokratiasta ja ammattiyhdistysliikkeestä Suomessa 1918–1930* (Helsinki: SHS, 1986), 89–104; on the formation of the critics, Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 120–139, 142–157.

3 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 37–58, 132–140.

however, did not prevent the delegates from making a decision on founding the Socialist Workers' Party of Finland at the beginning of the meeting and accepting the party platform, agricultural programme, rules, and the policy principals. The congress, however, could not be concluded. As it was decided that the new party would join the Third International, the police commissioner dissolved the meeting. He ignored the arguments that the socialist parties in many countries had joined the International and that the SSTP would also do so based on its own party platform.⁴

When dissolving the meeting, the police declared all the participants arrested but let the majority go. All those who had taken part in the preparations of the founding congress and who had spoken in the meeting were detained for questioning. Although the interrogations did not bring out any association with the SKP or the Soviet Union, which was regarded as criminal activity, the attorney general urged to press charges at the beginning of June, because, according to its party platform, the party attempted to overthrow the state by illegal means. In February 1921, the Turku Appeal Court condemned all the accused to prison charged with the preparation to commit high treason with sentences varying in length.⁵

The interruption of the founding congress left the supporters of the new party in confusion. The party had programme documents, but they did not include much about practical political work. Besides, the practical organisation of the party was left for the party committee, which had not been elected before the

meeting was dissolved. The provisional party committee, which had organised the founding congress, was imprisoned. At the beginning of June, the Helsinki socialist municipal organisation took the initiative to resolve the confusion. After coming to the conclusion that the decisions of the founding congress gave a basis for all practical matters, the meeting of the municipal organisation decided to declare itself as the Socialist Workers' Party, accept the documents of the founding congress, and elect a party leadership.⁶

The readiness of the municipal organisation to continue the political line of the founding congress indicated that the actions of the authorities were not a reason to forsake the concept of a new socialist party. The success of the left in the Finnish Trade Union Federation SAJ (Suomen ammattijärjestö) congress encouraged the municipal organisation to continue the process⁷. The attempts by the left faction of the SDP to change the SDP's political line to prevent the separation of the associations from the party probably sped up the decision of the municipal organisation to declare itself as the Socialist Workers' Party⁸. The promises of the Finnish labour organisations in America that they would collect "a million-mark fund" for a labour party that would assume a strong class struggle approach, provided further encouragement. The SSTP received the fund as a Christmas present in December 1920.⁹

Despite the initial difficulties, the SSTP quickly took its place among the Finnish political parties. In 1922, it had 24,400 members and 700 associations compared to the 31,800

4 Ibid., 160–161.

5 Ibid., 161–162.

6 Ibid., 164–165.

7 On the SAJ congress, Pirjo Ala-Kapee & Marjaana Valkonen, *Yhdessä elämä turvallisiksi: SAK:laisen ammattiyhdistysliikkeen kehitys vuoteen 1930* (Helsinki: SAK 1982), 497–521.

8 On the declaration of the SDP left, Hannu Soikkanen, *Kohti kansanvaltaa: Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue 75 vuotta*, vol. 1, 1899–1937 (Helsinki: SDP, 1975), 386–389.

9 Auvo Kostianen, *The Forging of Finnish-American Communism, 1917–1924: A Study in Ethnic Radicalism* (Turku, Turun yliopisto, 1978), 99–100.

members and 1,000 associations of the SDP. The party became strong especially in northern and north-eastern Finland but also in Helsinki and Turku and their neighbouring areas. It was successful in summoning trade union activists, especially workers in sawmills and harbours and on logging and construction sites. The SSTP also had an official organ, at *Suomen Työmies* newspaper in Helsinki, established largely with the “million-mark fund”, as well as, Finnish newspapers in Kuopio, Vaasa, Oulu and Kajaani and a Swedish newspaper in Vaasa.¹⁰ The party enjoyed a great success in the parliamentary elections in summer 1922; it achieved 128,121 votes, 14.8 % of all votes and 27 seats out of 200, while the result of the Social Democrats was 216,861 votes, a 25.1% share and 53 seats. Its 27 members of the parliament included six women.

Guidelines

The party platform was the main attempt to clarify the identity of the new group. On one hand, the programme wanted to demonstrate that the SSTP continued the traditions of the Finnish labour movement. Therefore, it was important to declare that the SDP had abandoned the politics of the old Finnish labour movement. The SSTP wanted to unite the workers as an independent movement opposing bourgeois groups. Contrary to the re-established SDP, it would not accept cooperation with the bourgeois parties.¹¹

On the other hand, the programme included expressions of solidarity with the Russian revolution and the example of the Bolsheviks. However, it drew a line at the declarations of the SKP and emphasised that the SSTP did not urge workers “into anarchist violence, disorder, rioting or rebellion”. Instead, the party

wanted by the means of enlightenment and organisational activity to contribute to the achievement of socialism peacefully and in an orderly fashion. The course of the revolution was, nevertheless, dependent on the methods the bourgeoisie employed. If the bourgeoisie resorted to violence, it would be difficult to achieve socialism peacefully.¹²

The party platform included the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat, though the concept was not explicitly mentioned. The programme, however, introduced the idea of the temporary state machine, which would discourage the opposition of exploiters. The connection with the Bolsheviks was more evident in the description of socialist society as a society of soviets. That part was copied from the programme of the Russian Communist Party, and the soviets were seen only as a body of future socialist society and not as active parties in starting a revolution.¹³

The SSTP party platform suggested that the power was situated within the machinery of violence. In the post-Civil-War Finland, that was demonstrated by the existence of the Detective Central Police (Etsivä Keskuspoliisi, EK), dedicated to the surveillance and persecution of the members of the labour movement, and the paramilitary organisation *Suojeluskunnat*. The importance of the control of the police authorities had also become evident in 1917 and 1918. However, the programme also spoke of enlightenment and the organisational work of the party, and thus expressed an interest in fighting for ideas, behaviour, and organisation within society typical of the pre-Civil-War SDP.

The latter aspect characterised the speech and practical work of the SSTP and was prominent in questions concerning the Civil War.

10 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 198, 309–318, 334.

11 *Suomen Sosialistisen Työväenpuolueen ohjelma* (Helsinki: SSTP, 1920), 17–19.

12 Ibid., 19–21.

13 Ibid., 25–27.

Showing a positive attitude to the Reds' activities in 1918 and the concern for those who had died in battles and executions or been arrested after the war had been an important issue for the critics within the SDP in 1919. These questions remained an essential part of the SSTP's identity, and the party and its members were actively involved in demanding the release of those imprisoned, commemorating the dead and collecting aid for orphans and widows. They also rejected the habit of the Whites to call the Civil War as "the war of liberation".¹⁴

By presenting a society based on soviets as its goal, the SSTP wanted to remind that new administrative units would be created in the revolution. That indicated criticism towards the representative institutions of bourgeois society. The parliament, however, had been an important body for the SDP before 1918, although its decision-making power was limited as the czar had had the ultimate power to approve decisions. In the founding congress, participation in parliamentary elections had been postponed to the next congress or to party vote. The municipal organisations gained the right to make a decision on the participation in municipal elections.¹⁵

The party, however, soon switched from criticism of the representative institutions to outlining instructions to work within them. In December 1920, the party council considered it possible to participate in the institutions

of bourgeois democracy. The SSTP, however, rejected the idea that power could be obtained via parliament. Nevertheless, the parliament could be used to repair the gravest shortcomings and injustices. It was, nonetheless, more important to use bourgeois institutions as agitation forums for exposing the treachery of bourgeois democracy and the false premise of the Social Democrats. These institutions should be employed as platforms for generating extra-parliamentary mass actions.¹⁶

The idea to use the parliament for the purposes of agitation was launched by the leftists in the Second International in the first decade of 20th century.¹⁷ The concept was known in Finland, and the SDP had, accordingly, used parliamentary agitation to promote class struggle in the 1910s.¹⁸ The idea became recognised again in 1920, when the Communist International included it in its instructions for working in parliament.¹⁹

By highlighting how municipalities were part of the bourgeois state apparatus, the SSTP followed the ideas of the Communist International. The tradition of pursuing self-government and the desire to achieve practical advantages for workers were stronger at a local level. The aim to exercise influence within municipalities had stayed alive, although in general the labour associations had boycotted municipal elections in the 1910s because of their undemocratic nature. In 1917–1918 that aim took shape in workers' local activi-

14 On this in detail, Tauno Saarela, "To Commemorate or Not: The Finnish Labor Movement and the Memory of the Civil War in the Interwar Period," in *The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy*, eds. Tuomas Tepora & Aapo Roselius (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014), 340–355.

15 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 173.

16 Ibid., 176–177.

17 See, e.g. Hans Manfred Bock, "Zur Geschichte und Theorie der Holländischen Marxistischen Schule," in *Organisation und Taktik der proletarischen Revolution*, by Anton Pannekoek & Hermann Gorter, ed. Hans Manfred Bock (Verlag Neue Kritik: Frankfurt, 1969), 16–18.

18 Jouko Heikkilä, *Kansallista luokkapoliittikkaa: Sosiaalidemokraatit ja Suomen autonomian puolustus 1905–1917* (Helsinki: SHS, 1993), 128–129, 200–203, 271–281, 294–298, 357–358.

19 Jane Degras, ed. and comp., *The Communist International 1919–1943: Documents*, vol. 1, 1919–1922 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 150–155.



The parliamentary group of the Socialist Workers' Party of Finland in 1923. Photo: The People's Archives.

ties concerning food and employment.²⁰ After the Civil War, municipal participation offered workers an opportunity to rise from their lesser position and have some influence²¹.

The SSTP and the SKP

The foundation and development of the SSTP was related to the disengagement of the SKP and the international communist movement from the idea of an immediate revolution, which was present in the documents of the SKP founding congress. This disengagement was easier for those of the SKP leadership who had come to Finland to work underground and had to adjust to the Finnish conditions after the Civil War. The relationship with the

SSTP, however, contributed to the SKP changing its orientation towards Finland instead of Soviet Russia and the Finnish refugees in its area. That was not an easy process and led to disputes between those SKP members who had come to Finland and those in Petrograd.

The SKP leaders who had been in Finland but had moved to Stockholm during the spring and summer of 1920, considered that after the foundation of the SSTP and the success of the left in the SAJ congress, it would be possible to establish a communist party within the SSTP and its key organs to include comrades living in the country. That would secure the joint direction of legal and illegal activities. After the foundation of the communist party

²⁰ Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 177–179.

²¹ E.g., Pertti Haapala, *Tehtaan valossa: Teollistuminen ja työväestön muodostuminen Tampereella 1820–1920* (Helsinki: SHS, 1986), 319–320.

in Finland, the party in Soviet Russia should be dissolved. The SKP leadership in Petrograd was not pleased with the idea of dissolving the SKP and instead wanted to preserve its status as the communist party of Finland. The SKP's party congress in August 1920 decided that the SKP should strengthen the communist influence and leadership in the SSTP. The aim was to develop the SSTP as a party educating candidates for the SKP.²²

The central committee in Petrograd achieved an upper hand as its connections into Finland improved, and they could replace those in Stockholm as the advisers for the SSTP. The SKP in Petrograd also created contacts with the SSTP leadership and started giving advice for public activities and offering financial support to the SSTP newspapers. The SKP, however, gave priority to the development of its own illegal organisation. That meant channelling resources to the creation of an underground organisation, which in no way served the purposes of the SSTP and its aim to gather as many labour associations as possible into its sphere. Besides, the secret cells dealt mainly with questions of which it would have been more fruitful to speak in public. The secret organisation could also endanger the public as the arrests for instance in Oulu district indicated.²³

Attempts were made at the fourth party congress of the SKP in the summer of 1921 to find a solution to the problems between the SSTP and the SKP and operating in two countries. The participation, however, indicated the end of the discussion on the SSTP party congress. It also suggested the acceptance of a procedure in the election of delegates which differed from the traditional process in the Finnish labour movement and was closer to an appointment than an election. Organising

the party congress in Petrograd also gave the SKP a home advantage, and the questions of the SKP quarrels formed the main agenda of the congress.²⁴

Why did the SSTP leadership accept a close relationship with the SKP and decide to participate in the SKP congress, although it endangered the existence of the whole party? The SSTP members had relatives and friends among those exiled in Soviet Russia, and it was easy to feel that they belonged politically to the same group. That was evident in its willingness to include those in exile in the amnesty of 1918. For the inexperienced SSTP leadership, the SKP leaders represented experience in the Finnish and the international labour movement as well as the Finnish revolution. Besides instructions based on experience, the SKP was also willing to give financial assistance to the SSTP. The participation also gave an opportunity to see the country where workers were said to be in power and to see how the Communist International, which the SSTP had discussed over the winter, worked. Furthermore, the young delegates found the secrecy of the trip and the meeting exciting.²⁵

In November 1920, the SKP had decided to create a Finnish Bureau, which would lead and guide public revolutionary activities in accordance with the instructions of the SKP. Initially, the central committee sent two people to Finland, who then chose an SSTP committee member as the third person for the Bureau. Later, the Finnish Bureau consisted of people appointed by the SKP and members of the SSTP leadership, but their relationship became equal, and as the involvement of the SSTP in the Finnish political life increased, those working in public became more important than those working underground.²⁶

²² Ibid., 210–221.

²³ Ibid., 203–206.

²⁴ Ibid., 228–230.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 195–197, 318–319.

The creation of a joint body, however, did not make the different conditions in Finland and Soviet Russia disappear. In Soviet Russia, where communists were in power, it was easier to follow communist instructions than in Finland, where the SSTP sought to overcome the losses of the Civil War and was fighting for its existence. Therefore, the SKP had a tendency to overlook the practical difficulties faced by the SSTP and regard the constant persecution of 'communist' organisations and members as a sign of the regime's weakness and imminent collapse. Therefore, they urged the SSTP to vehemently challenge the existing system. The SKP thought that the instructions should be immediately implemented. For the SSTP, those guidelines were principal statements, the implementation of which lacked practical preconditions in Finland. Thus, they did not have much to do with the day-to-day politics. The hostile attitude of the Finnish bourgeoisie to communism nourished the willingness of the SSTP to accept instructions from the SKP.

Internationalism

Although the International question had proved to be dangerous, the SSTP party council decided in December 1920 to organise a party vote on it by the end of March and recommended the acceptance of the 21 Conditions of Admission to the Communist International.²⁷ The recommendation was not hindered by the fact that the second World Congress of the International in summer 1920 had made admission more difficult. The congress had wanted to protect the purity in its ranks and had set conditions for the admission.²⁸

According to the Conditions, the centralisation of activities was important. Thus, the joining parties were requested to have their programme, agitation and propaganda in harmony with the programme and decisions of the Communist International. In addition, they would have to obey the decisions of the International. The principles of centralisation should be the rule also in the member parties; the press, publishing companies and parliamentary groups should obey the decisions of the central committee. The parties were also to have regular purges, and they were to create an illegal organisation and link it with the legal organisation.²⁹ The conditions ruined the idea of joining based on the programme proclaimed by the SSTP and its newspapers after the founding congress.³⁰

The question of internationalism was related to the relationship between the SSTP and the SKP, and the party vote was implemented on the initiative of the SKP. From the SKP point of view, the arrangement was convenient; if the SSTP rejected the 21 Conditions, it could be branded as centrist. However, if the SSTP were to accept them, it would have to submit itself to the instructions and orders of the International but also to the SKP as a section of Comintern. The SSTP leadership may have nurtured the idea that the party in Finland would be the real member of the International. That was what had happened in the youth movement. When the Social Democratic Youth Union of Finland had decided to enter the Communist Youth International, the underground Finnish organisation in Soviet Russia had been dissolved.³¹

27 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 187.

28 Kevin McDermott & Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke, Macmillan Press Limited, 1996), 17–18.

29 Degras, *Communist International*, 168–172.

30 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 161, 164.

31 Ibid., 190–192.

The conditions were presented in Finnish in a booklet *Kapitalistinen maailma ja Kommunistinen Internatsionale* (Capitalist world and communist International) in January 1921, but the authorities confiscated the booklet. The party's main body, *Suomen Työmies*, did not publish the conditions, but the local newspapers made them known to their readers. That did not imply that the party members and newspapers would have considered their significance. Hardly anybody paid attention to the 17th condition, which stated that the member party of the International would have to change its name to the "Communist party of such and such country (section of the Communist International)". Nobody pondered on the statement that every country could only have one united communist party. It was also more common to speak about the Third International than the Communist International.³²

Only the *Työväen Lehti* newspaper in Kaajaani picked up on the contradiction inherent in the 21 Conditions and the SSTP joining based on its own programme. The newspaper even presented a model which made joining "based on the party's own programme" possible: the Third International could admit sympathising parties that supported its goals. There was an example of this; the executive committee of the International had accepted the *Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschland* (KAPD) as such, even though the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD) was a member³³. The Norwegian Labour Party had also proposed that it would take a position of a sympathiser.³⁴

The article in the *Työväen Lehti* newspaper was in a slight discrepancy with the decision of the party council but did not arouse any discussion in other newspapers. That was main-

ly due to the decision of the Turku Appeal Court on the case of the SSTP founders on 8 February. According to the Appeal Court, the decision to join the Communist International was a criminal act. The SSTP leaders must have considered whether the whole party would be banned because of this decision. Accordingly, the party decided to postpone the party vote because it would stir too much attention. In public, the postponement was justified by explaining that the party had not had enough time to discuss the principles of the Third International. The party also started to re-emphasise that the founding congress had decided to join the International on its own programme and that the party did not yet fulfil the conditions for the admission into the International.³⁵

Despite the danger of being banned, many of the district congresses discussed the International question and made a decision on it in March. The decisions mostly condemned the Second International and considered the Third International as the only organisation standing up for the working classes. They also promised to make decisions of the Second Congress and the conditions for the admission known among their members and arrange a vote later. The district congresses accepted the conditions.³⁶

Thus, the SSTP arrived at a different solution concerning the 21 Conditions than parties in many other countries. The German *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (USPD) was split because of the Conditions, as were the French and Italian socialist parties and the Swedish *Sveriges Socialdemokratiska vänsterparti*. The Norwegian Labour Party eventually rejected them in November 1923. In the other countries, the discussion for

32 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 188; Degras, *Communist International*, 172.

33 Pierre Broué, *German Revolution, 1917–1923* (Leiden & Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005), 463–468.

34 Åsmund Egge, *Komintern og krisen i Det norske Arbeiderparti* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), 13–14.

35 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 189.

36 Ibid.

and against the Conditions was livelier than in Finland where the fear of the involvement of the authorities hindered the discussion.³⁷

For the SSTP members, the acceptance was above all an expression of solidarity with the Russian revolution and an attempt to find shelter and support. In the name of solidarity, they, however, were willing to resign themselves to a centralised leadership and accept that the decision-making powers moved further. It was unexpected coming from people who had recently objected to the control of the central leadership within the SDP and the centralised decision-making concerning strikes within the trade union movement. They were also prepared to accept a party concept which was different from the older one and instructions that were meant for the sections of the Communist International.³⁸

Extra-parliamentary activities

In the winter and spring of 1922, the SSTP attempted to set in motion and direct movements concerning unemployment, taxation, and housing. The general aim was to get people to stand up for their interests. The party believed that participation in the movements would increase people's knowledge about society and its development and when pursuing their interests, people would eventually become aware of the fact that their living conditions would not improve in capitalist society. The SSTP's assessment, however, was dominated by declarations of principles, not an analysis of the political situation in Finland.³⁹

The attempt was inspired by the ideas of the Third Congress of the Communist International⁴⁰, but it also had a domestic origin. In 1917, questions of unemployment and food had been connected to the question of local power, and they had also affected politics on national level.⁴¹ Unemployment surfaced again in 1920, and the unemployed had held meetings in many cities during the winters in 1920–1922. People were worried about the taxation reform in the fall of 1921 and tenants in the spring of 1922. These meetings had, as per tradition, presented demands to the parliament and municipal councils for arranging jobs and paying benefits, a reform of the taxation system and arranging housing for the homeless.⁴²

The unemployment, taxation and housing issues did not turn into important national questions, although the SAJ organised national meetings for the unemployed in 1921 and 1922. The SSTP accepted a document on the principals of taxation policy and offered advice on promoting a movement and encouraged tenants to organise themselves. Employment did not become a similar question of power as it had done in 1917. At a local level, the SSTP members followed previous practices; local labour associations had in the past presented demands on problems to local bodies, and that continued in the early 1920s. In addition, the interest in moving away from extra-parliamentary activities within the political bodies to promoting issues was greater at local level than on leadership level.⁴³

37 Åsmund Egge, "Comintern and the communist movements in the Nordic countries," in *Red Star in the North: Communism in the Nordic Countries*, eds. Åsmund Egge & Svend Rybner (Oslo: Orkana Akademisk, 2015), 89–94; Robert E. Wheeler, *USPD und Internationale: Sozialistischer Internationalismus in der Zeit der Revolution* (Frankfurt/M: Verlag Ullstein, 1975), 213–268.

38 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 189–190.

39 Ibid., 245–246.

40 Degras, *Communist International*, 241–243, 248–254.

41 E.g., Anthony F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution 1917–1918* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 31–32, 56–69.

42 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 254–261.

43 Ibid.

Involvement in these questions, however, guided the SSTP leadership into more practical policies, although the principles of the taxation policy was a programmatic declaration trying to convince people that the fight had to be directed at the capitalist system as it was no longer possible to fulfil demands within capitalism. The work carried out in the representative bodies increased the SSTP's commitment in Finnish society.

Within the representative bodies

Practice soon proved that the programmatic guidelines concerning the work carried out in the representative bodies were not particularly useful.

The SSTP stated well before the parliamentary election of 1922 that its participation did not mean agitation to revolution. The electoral platform, however, challenged the existing order by presenting a list of issues needing repair. A number of them involved decisions made by the White victors after the Civil War, especially the civil rights of workers and their organisations. They demanded the release of all the prisoners; the repeal of all the laws executed by the rump parliament in 1918-1919; the end of political and judicial persecution; the disbandment of Suojeluskunnat, the right-wing paramilitary organisation, and "ohrana", the political police. They also had demands on workers' economic position.⁴⁴

In the parliament, the SSTP was loyal to its electoral platform, and civil rights were the most important issue for the SSTP. That became evident immediately in the election of the speaker of the parliament. The SSTP group voted for Matti Väisänen, who had been elected into the parliament but had been imprisoned soon after the elections because he had attended a meeting that had declared a strike

at the sawmills and harbours of Northern Finland. For the authorities that was preparation for high treason, and although Väisänen, as the chair of the SAJ, had attempted to prevent the strike, he was imprisoned and sentenced to jail. By voting for Väisänen, the SSTP group wanted to demonstrate against political oppression and the imprisonment of the members of labour organisations.⁴⁵

The SSTP group chose interpellations as the way to highlight injustices in the Finnish society. From autumn 1922 to the spring of 1923, the party made seven interpellations, which mainly dealt with civil rights violations and the conditions of political prisoners. The motions the members of the SSTP group presented in the parliament concerned the deeds of the White victors of the Civil War in 1918, especially the enactments of the rump parliament in 1918. In other occasions, for instance in sessions dealing with budget proposal, the SSTP representatives spoke of civil rights violations and brought forward their interpretation of the events in 1918. The interpellations and other acts were attempts to demonstrate the injustices of bourgeois society and not efforts to overthrow the government or to agitate workers into immediate action.⁴⁶

The speeches of the SSTP group irritated the representatives of bourgeois parties, who considered those questions closed. The speeches, interpellations, and motions, however, did not have much influence on parliamentary work. Government bills were the chief subject for sessions, and the SSTP group had to take a stand on them. At times that was difficult because there was not always an existing position to assume, or it was not easy to unite the various standpoints.⁴⁷

An example of such a case was the bill on conscription, which was to replace the bill ac-

⁴⁴ Ibid., 269–270.

⁴⁵ Ala-Kapee & Valkonen, *Yhdessä elämä*, 642–647; Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 280.

⁴⁶ Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 281–282.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 282–283.

cepted by the rump parliament in February 1919 and which aimed to shorten the term of service from 18 months to 12 months. The SSTP group came to the conclusion that the bill would have to be rejected – but there were two differing viewpoints within the party. Those who followed the communist conception and, thus, considered military education necessary for the future revolution, defended the role of the army and the long term of service. On the other hand, the old pacifist attitude of the labour movement was still alive, although the labour youth in Finland, which had advocated pacifism during the World War, was also moving towards accepting military service as a place for agitation among the youth. The pacifist stance, however, contained the idea that the army was an organisation which strengthened the existing order and prevented the aims of the labour movement. It was also costly and increased the tax burden of workers.⁴⁸

It was also difficult for the SSTP to reconcile the principal and tactical approaches to the resettlement legislation, which aimed to make those without land into small holders. For the SSTP, the cause of the landless had been important from the very beginning, and its founding congress had accepted the idea of giving cultivated land to the actual farmers. According to the SSTP parliamentary group, the governmental bill did not fulfil these conditions, as the future small holders would have to pay for the land on which they had worked for years. In addition, the bill excluded many groups of rural people and those who had lost their civic confidence, and the redemption prices were high. Thus, the intention of the new bill was to chain landless people to debt slavery, and the bill was, thus, unacceptable. The party committee, however, studied the question from the perspective of the relation-

ship between workers and rural population and considered that by supporting the bill the party could say that it had done something for the rural population. The implementation of the reform could also demonstrate that bourgeois reforms were not enough. The parliamentary group accepted the position of the party committee.⁴⁹

In parliament, which became a very important forum for the SSTP, it was easier for its representatives to follow the traditions of the Finnish labour movement than the SKP instructions, which did not always relate to the political situation in Finland and were not, therefore, regarded as safe or reasonable.

The SSTP and the Social Democrats

The differing interpretations of the events in 1917–1918 made the cooperation between the labour parties difficult. The re-founders of the SDP gave priority to cooperation with the bourgeois centre and thought that the united activities of the entire labour movement would only strengthen the unity of the bourgeois parties, and especially so, if the cooperation concerned the results of the Civil War. The representatives of the SSTP tended to regard this as the Social Democrats' commitment to the existing social order. In addition, the struggle to control and direct common labour organisations, especially the trade union movement, sustained the antagonism between the SSTP and the SDP.

The question of amnesty for those condemned for participating in the Civil War was important to both labour parties, but they did not have much cooperation concerning it. Not even in parliament did their representatives work together, but both parliamentary groups made their own motions regarding the release of the imprisoned Reds, the support of Red orphans and other matters. Thus, their

⁴⁸ Ibid., 283–285.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 285–288.

proposals produced rather than reduced competition between the parties.⁵⁰

The SDP and the SSTP did not try to organise workers' demonstrations in support of their demands of amnesty, but local labour associations arranged mass meetings on the amnesty question. In January 1921, the SAJ, however, proposed to the labour parties that a day's general strike should be declared in March in order to put pressure on the amnesty demand. The SSTP accepted the proposal but the SDP turned it down because it would only strengthen the views against the amnesty. The SAJ, however, urged labour organisations to participate in demonstrations for the liberation of the political prisoners. In order to challenge the views of the victors of the Civil War, demonstrations took place all over the country on 16 May when the Whites celebrated their victory; however, the labour parties did not officially participate.⁵¹

The willingness of the SSTP to propose cooperation with the SDP increased in 1922. That was partly due to the threats to its existence, and partly due to the launch of the 'united front' slogan by the Communist International. According to it, the united front was supposed to be an offensive tactic, through which communists propagated demands related to workers' day-to-day interests.⁵² In Finland, the SSTP's proposals were mainly different in nature.

In an open letter to the SDP at the end of December 1921, the SSTP proposed the formation of a united front to prevent the so-called popular uprising in East Karelia from escalating into an armed conflict between

Finland and Soviet Russia. East Karelia was, according to the Dorpat Peace Treaty between Finland and Soviet Russia, regarded as part of Soviet Russia. The Treaty, however, referred to self-determination in the area. Soviet Russia interpreted that Karelia's working people's commune founded in 1920 would fulfil the demands of self-determination while the Finns thought that self-determination would be established later. After receiving a rejection from the SDP, revealing the SDP stand became priority for the SSTP.⁵³

Before the parliamentary elections in 1922, the SSTP proposed an electoral pact to the SDP in order to secure its participation in the election. Although the Social Democrats considered the SSTP's electoral programme acceptable, they, however, rejected the offer. They obviously suspected that the cooperation would unite the bourgeois parties.⁵⁴

After the parliamentary elections, the SSTP became more active and the parliamentary group made proposals on united actions concerning the amnesty of political prisoners. At first, the Social Democrats turned the proposals down, but in January 1923, they published a joint manifest urging workers to take part in demonstrations for amnesty but also for the reduction and abolition of customs duties. The latter items were included at the request of the Social Democrats who thought that the amnesty question alone would reproduce the polarisation of 1918. Both parties regarded the demonstrations as satisfactory, although they had to be arranged in the vicinity of labour halls instead of central squares. The cooperation did not continue, although the

⁵⁰ Saarela, "To Commemorate," 340–342.

⁵¹ Ala-Kapee & Valkonen, *Yhdessä elämä*, 536–537; Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 186.

⁵² On the launch of the united front, McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 27–33.

⁵³ On the East Karelia question, Toivo Nygård, *Suur-Suomi vai lähiheimolaisten auttaminen: Aatteellinen heimo-työ itsenäisessä Suomessa* (Helsinki: Otava, 1978), 86–94; on the SSTP proposal, Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 249–251.

⁵⁴ Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 268–269; Soikkanen, *Kohti kansanvaltaa*, 407–408; Kettunen, *Poliittinen liike*, 292–295.

SSTP made new cooperation proposals. The Social Democrats considered the advantages of the cooperation fewer than the disadvantages of the reaction it created among the bourgeois parties.⁵⁵

The SSTP did not like the idea of exposing Social Democrats as the workers' enemies because they had rejected the united front proposals, a manoeuvre advocated by the SKP. It only attacked the Social Democrats in January 1922 for rejecting the cooperation proposal.⁵⁶

Not everyone within the SSTP was interested in the united front proposals. In the northern parts of the country, where the party was strong and the Social Democrats enjoyed only limited support, the joint proposals were regarded as unnecessary: a united front with the Social Democrats would not increase the strength of workers and would only help the Social Democrats to survive in the area. The youth movement had similar thoughts, and it was reluctant to follow the instructions of the Communist Youth International or the SKP. In addition, the former functionaries of the SSTP in the Tammisaari prison did not support the proposals of the united front. However, the SSTP members in areas where their support was weak welcomed the cooperation.⁵⁷

The end

The operations of the police in the SSTP founding congress in May 1920 and the decisions of the courts in February and April 1921 indicated that the authorities disapproved of a workers' party that did not accept the existing society and spoke of overthrowing it. The chief of the Detective Central Police suggested in February 1921 that all the activities of the

SSTP and its associations should be forbidden, and the members of its national and local leaderships prosecuted for the preparation of treason. The bourgeois press and parties expressed similar ideas. According to them, it was inconsistent that the party, whose founders had been sentenced for the preparation to commit high treason by the Supreme Court, was allowed to continue its activities, despite the fact that its programme remained the same. The majority in the government, however, did not support the idea.⁵⁸

The authorities, however, were interested in silencing the SSTP press, and started legal actions against the newspapers, which had published articles dealing with the events of 1917–1918 and printed criticism of the activities of the authorities. For the members of the bourgeois parties, the interpretations regarding the events in 1917–1918 that differed from their own were only paying tribute to treason and advocated and prepared for the violent overthrow of the existing social system. That indicated that those in power wanted to silence the critics of dominant thoughts and institutions by claiming them to be "communists". The attempts of the Finnish authorities to silence the SSTP newspapers were at its highest in 1921 and 1922 when there were 82 and 38 cases against the SSTP press. The cases usually resulted in fines or one to four months in prison for the chief editors but also the closure of the newspaper for three months.⁵⁹

Besides the imprisonment of the active members in the founding congress, the party endured arrests in other occasions too. In January 1922, the members of the party committee and the chief editors of the newspapers which had published a statement in the acute

55 E.g., Kettunen, *Poliittinen liike*, 295–298.

56 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 250, 296–300.

57 Ibid., 305–307.

58 Ibid., 351–352.

59 Saarela, "To Commemorate," 346–348; Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 352.

Karelia question with the hope that the incident would lead to the toppling of capitalism were arrested and prosecuted for the preparation of an armed rebellion on the Russian side.⁶⁰

In the spring of 1923, the right-wing press and organisations pushed the authorities into action against the SSTP. They were obviously encouraged by their success with the Social Democratic Youth Union, which had cooperated with the SSTP. They had demanded its suspension since the summer of 1922 and were rewarded in April 1923, as the Helsinki lower court made the decision to suspend it. In May 1923, the chief of the Detective Central Police decided to take action in order to end the public activities of the “communist party”.⁶¹

In the beginning of August, the Detective Central Police, by order of the acting minister of the interior, started the arrests of the SSTP national and local leaderships and its members of the parliament. In addition, the newspapers of the SSTP and the printing houses were confiscated, and their editors arrested. After the arrests, the government gave a declaration, which attempted to prove that the SSTP was the Finnish body of the Russian Communist Party and the Communist International.⁶²

In June 1924, the Appeal Court in Turku concluded that the characterisation of the prosecutor on the SSTP was right and condemned 189 people to prison with sentences of varying lengths and declared the party organisations disbanded. Thus, the Appeal Court introduced into the legal praxis a new indication of preparation for treason: a participation in the activities of a public labour or-

ganisation. Earlier a practical deed was needed to commit treason.⁶³

In March 1925, the Supreme Court confirmed the decision, but added the contacts of the SSTP with the Communist International in the reasoning.⁶⁴ As the local courts declared the municipal organisations of the party disbanded in the same year, the Socialist Workers' Party of Finland became history. Its idea, though, stayed alive in the *Sosialistisen työväen ja pienviljelijäin vaalijärjestö* STPV (Socialist workers' and smallholders' electoral organisation) in the 1920s and was revived in 1944 in the foundation of the *Suomen kansan demokraattinen liitto* SKDL (Finnish People's Democratic League).

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60 Saarela, *Suomalaisen kommunismin*, 252.

61 Ibid., 353–354.

62 Ibid.

63 Lars Björne, "... syihin ja lakiin eikä mielivaltaan ...": *Tutkimus Turun hovioikeuden poliittisista oikeudenkäynneistä vuosina 1918–1939* (Helsinki: Lakimiesyhdistys, 1977), 80–92, 101–107.

64 Ibid., 92, 102.

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